

ART PAPERS

ELAINE CAMERON-WEIR
NEW YORK

by Natalie Bell

In Elaine Cameron-Weir's solo show *without true bazaars*, objects occupy measurable space while holding critically indifferent positions [RAMIK-EN CRUCIBLE; may 8 - june 19, 2011]. Stoic and implacable, each sculpture stands on its own, wholly independent of the others and without a manifest message. Cameron-Weir's works are neutral and discrete like Judd's "specific objects."

Yet, despite the formal allusions, they lack minimalism's critical stance and don't easily suggest any utility. The press release also shirks its typical function-to point out the works' significance-and operates more like found poetry. "Rather the too many around, and the dandy is an impotent creature," and "Again years sculpture Coumarin, among distinctive additive; Coumarin by anti-human." We're left with, "One content is categorization. The process, the from an absolut." The burden of interpretation is entirely upon us, without compromise. For a change, our engagement with the artworks is under-mediated, and Cameron-Weir's move here is as refreshing as it is intentional.

Cameron-Weir's prevailing gesture, however, is to anoint each object with its own essential qualities. In this, each piece is fastidiously conceptualized and fetishized. Impassive and assured, her works possess both an aura of philosophical consequence and a certain wit. Another text accessible on the gallery's website provides a few interpretive suggestions, borrowing from Baudelaire to give a specific reading for these canny plastic aesthetes: objects-as-dandies. Indeed, their anti-utility embodies the spirit of Baudelaire's dandy-"a Hercules with no labors to accomplish." So much so that one can easily picture the works having initiated their own aestheticization.

We can imagine that *100*, 2010, once a stubby cigar-like billet, begged Cameron-Weir to be turned inside out and stretched into a lean dowel to rid itself of functionality and to reveal only its most primary attributes.

At a handsome eight feet, it leans seductively against the wall. Sure of the allure of its heightened refinement and now certain that it shall never be smoked, it offers just a hint of the scent of the rolling tobacco in which it's neatly encrusted.



Column II, 2010, reveals the qualities of a birdcage while withholding its utility. It's as if, at a point in the birdcage's construction, it became enamored of its slender brass bars and bid their elongation until, at six feet, it was pleased by its lofty stature and the daintiness of its open crown. Both *Column II* and *Pedestal*, 2011-a seven-foot tall plaster plinth-upon-plinth recalling Brancusi's *Endless Column*, 1938, in their static yet vertical ambitions. However, their hyper-aestheticized posturing, accompanying a tongue-in-cheek reference to their own elevated status as objets d'art, significantly departs from Brancusi.

Other works follow in setting a tone of decadence and artifice. *Midnight Sun*, 2011, features a steel screen coated with a slightly-perfumed blue wax-a blend of Guerlain's L'Heure Bleue, the chemical compound coumarin, which carries the smell of fresh-cut hay, a wood-tar phenol, wax, and pyralene-an ingredient that may or may not encode a bit of Duchamian wordplay as its French pronunciation reveals a less-than pleasant chemical compound: pure hale-ine, or "worst breath." With so much Baudelaire in the air, I can't help but think of his prose poem, "The Dog and the Scent Bottle," wherein the poet's pet recoils upon sniffing his owner's fancy perfume, causing the narrator to liken his dog to the public, who "should never be offered delicate perfumes...only carefully selected garbage." There's humor in reading this work through this particular dandy's facile and fetching tenor-"You don't like it? You dog!"-but even without, it's still emblematic of Baudelairean art-for-art's sake. And despite their critical neutrality, the works clearly utter one message-delivered in a tone that could cash a shadow. As Oscar Wilde predicted: "The future belongs to the dandy. It is the exquisites who are going to rule."